

Germantown Sailor a Trailblazer for Navy Progress  
By: JO2 Andrea Leahy, USS Germantown Public Affairs

ABOARD USS GERMANTOWN, At sea -- One out of every four sailors onboard the amphibious ship USS Germantown (LSD 42) is female. That statistic may not sound too impressive when you consider females make up half the population of the United States. But if you take into consideration that when Germantown was commissioned in 1986, there were no female sailors on it or any other combatant ship in the fleet, you can see the Navy has come a long way in gender equality.

Senior Chief Information Systems Technician (Surface) Jayne Galbreath, 44, saw the changes up close. When she enlisted nearly 26 years ago, female sailors weren't stationed on any American ships. She remembers when the repair ship USS Vulcan (AR 5) became the first ship in the fleet to deploy with women on board. Galbreath was a seaman at the time stationed in Naples, Italy.

"Everybody thought ... they were going to put them on a plane and fly them to the Mediterranean," Galbreath said. "They just could not get in their heads that they were bringing the ship over with women onboard."

The Vulcan made its first port call of the cruise in Italy. Galbreath and a woman she worked with went to the pier to greet the ship and its female sailors. They didn't actually see anyone, but, Galbreath said, she knew it was an exciting time to be a woman in the Navy.

"My sister's generation and before them--I would look at them as the pioneers," Galbreath said. "It was like they were trying to prove that they could do a man's job. That was the attitude. 'I can do this. I can do a job just like you can.' ... When I came in, I got to a point where I said, 'I'm not here to do a man's job.... I'm here to do a job, and if I can do the job, let me do it.'"

A job is exactly what Galbreath needed when she joined the Navy in 1978. She said she was looking for a way to support herself; she wasn't looking to change the world.

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“[Civilian] women didn’t get paid the same amount as men did when I came in,” she said. “They did in the military, but [they] had different rules.”

Once Galbreath completed boot camp and initial rate training, she was on her way to Naples, where she worked at a small Naval Air Station. She got engaged there, then ended up not going through with the wedding. After splitting up with her fiancé, she found out she was pregnant.

“They wanted me to get out. In those days all a [pregnant] woman had to do was just request permission,” she said. “Then I was counseled by medical telling me to give my child up for adoption.” Galbreath choose to keep her baby and stay in the Navy. Her son Jacob is now a US Navy ensign.

“I was told that me or my child would never amount to anything,” Galbreath said. “It was a chief who said that to me. And I sit here and just smile as a senior chief because he retired as a chief. ... Today he would be saluting my son.”

“I believe all of [my children] are very successful, and I really do believe that has everything to do with the kind of lifestyle we have lived in the military and the Navy,” Galbreath said.

Galbreath doesn’t blame the Navy for the unequal treatment she and other women had to endure.

“It was not the Navy, it was always individuals who wanted to put their value system—their way of life—on me or on others,” she said. “I still to this day get very upset when people who are serving their country take away the constitutional rights from others who are serving by their sides.”

Throughout her Navy career, Galbreath has always been an advocate for regulations that promote equal opportunity and the enforcement of those regulations.

“The day I have to stop being a woman in the Navy, I’ll quit,” she said. “Men have a right to be men, and women have a right to be women. It’s OK. ... You would never ask anybody to give up their race. Why would you ask somebody to give up their gender?”

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Even today the Navy still has not reached the level of equality Galbreath would like to see. She said things are much better than they once were, and Navy policies strongly support equal opportunity. However, that equality is put at risk by the actions of individuals, male and female, who don't recognize the fact that both genders are equally capable of performing their jobs and equally responsible for their actions.

"I encourage my junior sailors. I want them to be smarter than me," she said. "The smarter they are, the better they are, [the less I] have to worry." Galbreath said she believes her job as a senior chief is to take care of her sailors. She doesn't want to micromanage them.

Galbreath explained, "Authority comes from your seniors, but your power comes from your juniors. I realize my power and my control is only because [the people in my] division recognize and want to please me. They want to do well, and they're the ones who make it happen. I don't forget that."

Galbreath also said knowing her people helps her find the right person for every job and the right job for every person.

While Galbreath fully understands that all of her people are different, she said she still expects them to share at least one common goal: to always try to better themselves. She learned first hand how difficult moving forward can sometimes be when her husband Joe passed away while she was underway on the Milius.

"When he died, we did what we had to do to give him a proper burial, and then I made my kids move on as I made myself move on. We were not allowed to go worse. We had to go better," she said.

Now that Galbreath is reaching the end of her Navy career and planning for retirement, she said she's once again making herself enter the next stage of her life in a better position than she entered the last.

"What am I focusing on now? I'm [working out], I quit smoking," she said. "You have to move yourself and make yourself better, and so that's my next page when I retire. I am leaving definitely better than the way I came in."

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Galbreath will also leave the Navy knowing she achieved more than anyone would have believed when she came on active duty 26 years ago. At that time, her goal was to do 20 years and retire as a 2nd class petty officer.

“I did better than that,” she said. “Who would have thought that was possible? The thing was, not giving up. Even though I know I’m retiring, I don’t work like I’m retiring. I always remember I’m being paid by the American people to do a job.”

Galbreath said she still isn’t sure what she’ll do after retiring from the Navy later this year, but she knows no matter what fate has in store for her and her family, she’ll be ready to face it head on.

“I’m not intimidated,” she said. “What are they going to do to me that hasn’t already happened to me?”

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